

APPRECIATION

Mr. N.P. Mitton.

The news of the death of Mr. N.P. Mitton in a car accident has been a sad shock to his many friends and admirers.

Norman Philip Mitton was born in West Bromwich in 1916. At an early age he developed a passionate love of nature, and an absorbing interest in the techniques connected with the preservation and display of Natural History objects. He was trained as a taxidermist in Birmingham, and came out to Africa in 1938, where he knew he would find greater opportunities for perfecting his techniques and more scope for his talents. His war service in the army took him to Ethiopia and East Africa during the early part of the war, and it was then that he came to know and love the East African scene which he was to portray so effectively in some of his later work.

After 1942 Norman Mitton served as a gunner in the Middle East and in Italy until the end of the war, and then returned to Africa in 1945. He was employed by the Transvaal Museum as Taxidermist for a few years, but seized the first opportunity to return to his beloved East Africa, when he was offered a post on the staff of the Coryndon Museum by Dr. L.S.B. Leakey, in 1950.

At that time, thanks to the enthusiasm and dedication of Dr. Leakey, funds had been raised for extensions to the old Museum which more than doubled its original exhibition space. Mr. Allen Turner, a man of advancing years and failing health, had up to then been responsible for the preparation and display of all exhibition material. The task of preparing new exhibits for the large new empty galleries was clearly too much for one man, and Norman Mitton assisted him at first and took over complete charge of the work a little later, when Allen Turner died.

Norman Mitton met the formidable challenge of re-organising the entire Museum with hard work, selfless dedication, unerring taste and with an uncanny grasp of technical problems. Step by step, despite a perennial shortage of finance, staff and equipment, the Coryndon Museum became one of the finest in Africa and a source of pride and prestige to Kenya.

Much of what the visitor of today admires in what is now the National Museum is the work of Norman Mitton, and a permanent tribute to his great talents; his Natural Habitat Groups are outstanding, and the perfection of his life-like casts of fish and reptiles unsurpassed; indeed the entire Museum bears the stamp of his genius. Not one to rest on his laurels, he was never satisfied with his achievements, and forever experimented with improved techniques and more satisfying display methods; in fact he was a great artist and a great all round naturalist, as well as a brilliant technician.

Norman Mitton was an exceptionally well read man with a wide range of interests covering literature, the theatre and visual arts as well as current scientific and technical developments. His outstanding talents and achievements, his unfailing generosity and attractive personality, earned him universal respect and popularity, and his untimely death will be a great personal loss to his many

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friends, whose deepest sympathy goes out to his widow and children.

Norman Mitton's services to Kenya were outstanding and his loss to our National Museum is one that can never be made good.

R.H.C.